RESEARCH PROPOSAL

On

A Case Study of Craftmanship Traditions in Unchehara Village Madhya Pradesh: Design Innovation and Socio-Cultural Concerns

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by

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1. Introduction

ऊँचे बसा उचेहरा, तर है बरूआ नार,

बेटी बनी बघेल की, कुंवर बने परिहार।

पीर नौगजा के जहां नौ गज केर मजार,

साल भरे का मिलत हैं बर्तन जहां उधार।।

कुंइयन का पानी जहां लगै बहुत सखार,

हेन कुटीर उद्योग अस मडवन का व्यापार ।।

Source: Agarwal, K. (2023). *नागौद राज्य का इतिहास*

This research narrates the traditional craft of *Phool* metalwork, focusing particularly on the crafting of *Phool* utensils in the town of Unchehara, situated within the Satna district of Madhya Pradesh, India. For nearly a century, the tin and copper alloy so richly cultured yet economically important to the region is known as *Phool* metal.

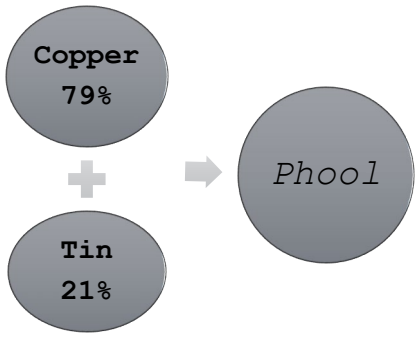

Figure 1: Composition of *Phool,* **Source:** Scholar

This craft is held in very high regard by the local community because it is thought to produce utensils that last longer and improve health for persons, while carrying also practical as well as ceremonial importance. The craft, however, is beset with many problems associated with industrialization, change of taste of consumers, and lack of access to the market in recent years although the craft is centuries old.

The study intends to explore the present scenario of the *Phool* metal craft in Unchehara, conduct research into the present day importance of its history, and determine challenges facing craftsmen in the contemporary period. Moreover, it aims to research the role played by the industry of the *Phool* craft in the local economy, methods of production, and socio-economic elements of the artisans engaged in this craft.

This research aims to highlight potential scope in sustainable development and preservation of this craft during the pressure of the current economy. Thus, analyzing the structure of the industry of the craft of *Phool*, the history and the importance of the craft, and the current problems that the

artisans face today, the research will try to provide recommendations for revitalizing the industry so that it can be sustained for future generations.

A) Wind Chimes

B) Paintings of Deities

C) Decorative *Thali*

Figure 2: Decorative items Made of *Phool,***Source:** Scholar

A) Bowls

B) *Phool Thali*

C) Utensils Set

Figure 3: *Phool* Utensils, **Source:** Scholar

A) Singing Bowls

B) Ghanta

C) Gharial

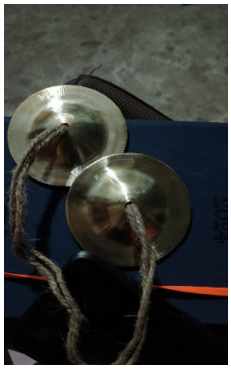
D) Manjeera

Figure 4: Musical Instruments made of *Phool,* **Source:** Scholar

2. Review of Literature

- Indian traditions have always housed bronzes for thousands of years. The contained nutrients in the food are 97% preserved in these utensils and are said to have antimicrobial characteristics. Ayurveda has written a lot about copper and tin alloys relating to various health benefits. These have pacified Vata and Pitta, have been useful for digestion purposes, and enhance memory. Bronze utensils have gained much importance in rituals related to religions and cultures by passage of time, especially in Satna, Madhya Pradesh. The place is also famous for its bronze-making capability. The problem, however lies with the traditional industry of bronze due to higher costs and low demand today. Without much support from the government, it becomes a little tough for artisans at Unchehara to maintain the trade (Chandra, 18 January 2024).

- Utensils of *phool*, originally made from an alloy of tin, lead, and sometimes brass or copper, are being used in the houses because it has benefits towards health. These utensils that exactly look like silver, have been known to prevent sour food as in curd from getting spoiled. They reduce stress, increase energy, regulate weight, treat joint pains, stabilize blood pressure, and help maintain stabilized blood sugar levels (Adapted from a news article (28 October, 2022).

- Satna District in Madhya Pradesh: The Unchehara tehsil in Satna district is famous for traditional *Kansa* utensils. Tamrakars, the community, has been producing these utensils for generations. About 500 families are still engaging in this ancient craft and the utensils are in widespread use not only in Indian states but the entire product is exported from India to other countries too. These utensils carry cultural and religious sentiments; they have historical significance dating back to Mahabharata times. However, the Tamrakar artisans still use their traditional heritage as their significant source of income. The utensils are also believed to be offering healing to various diseases (Based on Pradeep Kashyaps report, MP News, March 28, 2023).Satna News: Uchehras Bronze Utensils Sell in International Markets, Giving Health Benefits.

- Unchehara in Satna district of Madhya Pradesh has a long tradition of bronze and brass utensils, otherwise hand-made by nearly every family of the area. But with all the technological advancement and increase in raw material prices, only marquee functions like marriages are done on these utensils. The rest of the meals are rarely used because of their technological less compatibility. This craft has been in the Tamrakar community for many generations. The high prices of wood and the metals needed for production due to which, even now, these utensils are manufactured by hand despite this impediment. It is believed that bronze and brass utensils have their own medicinal value, and they have cultural importance as they are used during Dhanteras festival. Although the usage of this craftwork has decreased and the government also does not give any proper support, there are people in Unchehara who put all their efforts to preserve this traditional craftwork, and the items produced are not only used in India but also exported worldwide. (Based on Rakesh Kumar Patels report, One India Hindi, accessed on October 22, 2022).

- Unchehara is the tehsil in the Satna district of Madhya Pradesh, which produces bronze, brass, and "phool" metal utensils that sell all over India and abroad. According to popular myth, it is said that the Sun God offered a "Akshaya Patra" or a never-emptying pot made of brass to Draupadi during the Mahabharata period as an oath of prosperity. This colour is also of the yellow shade of brass, and just like that of Lord Vishnu, so it is also used during religious ceremonies and worship. About 500 families from Tamra community continue the traditional craft, which can be said to be a handloom industry; every artisan puts much effort in the manufacturing of each utensil. (Adapted from the report of Pradeep Kashyap of News18 Hindi, August 23, 2024).

- *Phool* ke bartan: This is an ancient craft of creating the most basic utensils from a metal alloy rich in minerals, used extensively till the advent of low-cost stainless steel. In Madhya Pradesh, a village called Unchehara was known as Uchichhakalpa during the Gupta Dynasty and was famous for exporting these utensils throughout India especially to Uttar Pradesh. The younger generation shifted to other means of livelihood, thus reducing the demand in the market, which reduced this craft. The antique art of phool ke bartan will be on the brink of extinction and is also raising concerns about the loss of the traditional knowledge as well as the craftsmanship that would be lost with the loss of the art (Trivedi, 2019).

- This traditional craft of bronze and brass utensils from the Unchehara region of Satna, Madhya Pradesh, has been an important tradition of the Tamrakars for generations. Nearly every family used to practice this craft generation after generation and produce utensils that were sold all across the nation. However, in recent times, with the factor of rising production costs and the attraction of mass-produced stainless steel, the youth have remained aloof from this heritage and have seen its decline. Currently, it is only 500 families who are contributing to the production of handicraft utensils that once were essential in most marriages. This decline has resulted in erosion of cultural identity and losing traditional knowledge since bronze and brass products are continually in low demand (Gautam, N., 2022).

- Tamrakar is a traditional craft of bronze and brass utensils in Unchehara region, Satna, Madhya Pradesh. Almost every family was into this craft generation after generation; they were making utensils that were being distributed all over the country. However, increasing production costs and the preference of machine-made stainless steel products are causing the industry to decline as this heritage is declined by the younger generation. Currently, only about 500 families remain to create these handmade utensils that earlier played a key role in holding ceremonies, especially weddings. This has resulted in lost cultural identity and traditional knowledge since the demand of bronze and brass keeps going low (Patel R.K., 2022).

- This is tourism in their "Textile and Craft Tourism" the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board aims to increase by setting up artisan centers, cafeterias, homestays, and digital museums in places such as Chanderi, Maheshwar, Bagh, and Unchehara, famous for its textile heritage. Its aim is to facilitate tourists to connect with the states busy textile life and provide an opportunity for local artisans to showcase Madhya Pradeshs different handlooms and crafts (Times of India, 2023).

- Phool utensils, a very common feature in Indian houses have largely given way to modern-day steel, ceramics, and similar products. These utensils were made of a specific combination of tin, lead, and sometimes brass or copper, which were also appreciated for their health benefits and their silver-like shiny colour. Phool utensils have been said to be non-reactive and, hence, it is excellent to use them with acids. Quality food items like yogurt can be ascertained by utilizing Phool utensils (News18 हिंदी, 2024). Phool utensils were very vital in Hindu traditions and for life.
  They are said to offer several health benefits similar to those credited to brass and copper cookware. Among these benefits include the relief from stress, increased energy, relief from joint pains, and otherwise regulation of blood pressure and sugar levels in the blood. Although they may have declined, renewed interest in phool utensils has brought life back into them because the more people have come to understand how important those utensils are: historically and practically (News18 हिंदी, 2024).

- Naro Fort was captured from Teli Raja in 1344 A.D. and in 1478 A.D. Raja Bhoja captured Unchehara, the old Uchchakalpa, and declared it his capital and laid its foundation as the Nagod State. This capital was there until 1720 when Raja Chain Singh shifted it to Nagod and therefore, this process of establishment of Unchehara is very important in the history (Sinha, 1994).Again, according to the Census conducted in 1961, 26,050 workers, that is, 3.8% of the population, were found to be working in household and cottage industries, out of whom bidi making was the occupation of 39%.Other such industries which have gained greater importance are bamboo artifact production, the products of pottery and livestock-raising. It was the occupier of 1.7% of workers, thus making Unchehra a bell-metal working center (Sinha, 1994). Other traditional industries were handloom cloth, ochre (at Jaitwara, mechanized) and also declined in recent years. Cooperative societies have been established to promote cottage industries in the towns of Unchehra, Ramnagar, Amatara and Akahi (Sinha, 1994).

- Uchahara or Uchahada is a small town with a railway station six miles southwest of Bharhut on the main line between Allahabad and Jabalpur. It was so named after the chiefship of a Parihar Raja who moved thereafter to Nagod as Unchehara became a military cantonment. Its location on the crossroads of all the important roads made it a significant place in history. Unchehara was referred to as Barme in former times. Barme Nadi separated Mahiyar and Unchehara chiefships, and the area for which the Parihar Chief claimed a vast territory extended from the Ghats to Bilhari and into the Baghel country (Archaeological Survey of India, 1879). The Parihar dynasty is said to be older than the

Chandels of Mahoba and the Baghels of Rewa and may be associated with the Poruári referred by Ptolemy. They are famous for notable edifices like Lakshman Sagar and the fort of Singorgarh. Today, no ancient structures exist, but archaeological remains from a period of 700-800 A.D. prove that the Parihars did exist. Teliya Ráj dynasty reigned over this region from Kho before the Parihars. The Parihar family traces its ancestry back to Abu-Sikhar (Mount Abu) over thirty generations, but they do not maintain a record of history more than that. Essentially, Unchehara is an important historical site as it occupies a strategic place and it has relation with powerful Parihar dynasty (Archaeological Survey of India, 1879).

- Census 2011 showed that Unchehara *Phool* Thali Udyog is a highly prized traditional cottage industry in Satna district that has been known in the country for ages. This craft, based on the customs of Tavers of Unchehara, dates back to the time when the district was in its earlier stages. The craftsmanship was more or less associated with local customs and ceremonies. But the industry witnessed a massive slump in sales primarily owing to rising costs of raw material, prevailing governmental laws, and soaring demand of steelware. Still, Phoolwares have become a must-have for Hindu weddings as the metal itself is revered. It might very well be the only factor that ensured the survival of the Unchehara Phool Thali Udyog whereas all other market forces threatened its existence.

3. Causal model

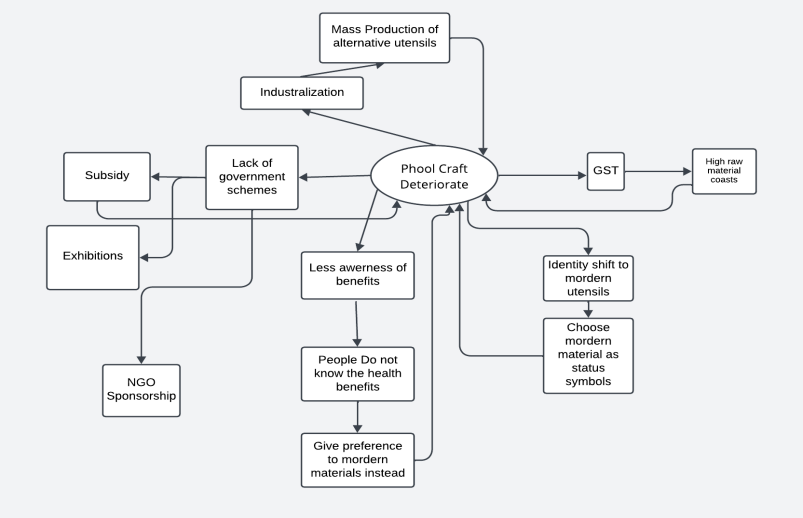

Figure 5: Causal Model, **Source:** Scholar

The causal model, as described in the above image, explains the elements that degrade "**Phool Craft**", a traditional craft, along with the interactions between those elements. Below is an elaborate description of the model:

A) Central Problem:

- **Deterioration of Phool Craft:** The central node shows the decline in the traditional craft, which is a result of several interrelated causes and effects.

B) Factors Involved:

a) Industrialization and Mass Production:

- Industrialization and mass production of alternative utensils decrease the demand for Phool Craft products.
- Modern manufacturing processes make alternative materials more accessible and economical.

b) High Raw Material Costs:

- The increasing cost of raw materials makes Phool Craft less competitive in the market.
- This is further compounded by policies such as GST (Goods and Services Tax), which brings in the financial pressure.

c) Identity Shift and Modernization:

- Modern utensils and materials are preferred more by people because they relate to social status.
- This identity shift nullifies the cultural and traditional importance of Phool Craft.

d) Lack of Awareness:

- There is less knowledge of the benefits of Phool Craft, including health benefits.
- The general public favors modern material, and the craft declines.

e) Lack of Government Schemes:

- There is inadequate government support in terms of subsidies, schemes, or policies to promote and protect the traditional crafts.
- There is a lack of proper arrangement of exhibitions and events to present Phool Craft products.
- There is no sponsorship from NGOs or other organizations that further limits promotion and awareness.

C) Causal Links:

a) Economic Pressure:

- Industrialization and high raw material costs directly raise the challenge of production.
- GST imposes extra financial burden.

b) Social and Cultural Changes:

- Modern utensils are a status symbol, which reduces the demand for Phool Craft.

c) Knowledge Gap:

- Lack of proper education or publicity makes people ignorant of the speciality of the craft, accelerating its decline.

d) Policy and Support Deficit:

- A lack of government schemes reduces access to subsidies and promotional platforms, thereby making it difficult for artisans to sustain the craft.

D) Mitigation Strategies:

- Promote the benefits of Phool Craft through targeted campaigns.
- Advocate for subsidies, lowered GST, and government moves to help artisans.
- Cooperate with NGOs and organize exhibitions and sponsors.
- Highlight the cultural and health advantages of traditional crafts to counter modernization trends.

4. Problem Identification

Despite its numerous benefits, the once famous art of *Phool* craft, mainly in the Unchehara village, faces extinction. Such a highly revered art form in the region has been vanishing year by year. There was a lack of comprehensive research on the challenges and opportunities that *Phool* craft faces in Unchehara. The fall has been even more contributed by an academic lack of attention because it lacked the sense of corresponding adjustment to the core reason behind its waning importance. Critical deficiency in knowledge and protection of this cultural heritage is a result of the scholarly lack of engagement towards the *Phool* craft.

5. Objectives

1. To explore the history, current practices, and challenges faced by the artisans involved in Unchehara traditional metal craft.

2. To evaluate the role and recognition of Unchehara craft at the regional level, identifying factors that can promote its growth and sustainability.

3. To examine the Socio-economic conditions of Unchehara artisans, identifying key financial challenges and exploring potential solutions.

6. Research Questions

RQ1) What are the factors contributing to the decline of traditional crafts such as the Unchehara *Phool* Thali Udyog?

RQ2) What is *Phool* metal, and what are its key components and uses in local craftsmanship?

RQ3) What is the historical significance of Unchehara in the context of traditional metalwork and handicraft?

7. Hypothesis

H1: Because of increased industrialization, modernization and availability of cheaper alternatives like plastic and steel, the demand for traditional Phool utensils has declined.

H2: The Phool metal craft industry artisans in Unchehara suffer from acute economic issues due to highly restricted market entry, inadequate government support, and lack of modern tools and technology.

H3: Reviving the antient craft of Phool metal by encouraging governments, Extending the current market, Production by modern technique can take a pivotal role in Empowering the local economy and conserving cultural heritage.

8. Limitations of the study

- It will specifically focus upon the *Phool* (bronze) utensils manufactured in Unchehara but exclude other kinds of utensils produced in the region.

- The sample would comprise only artisans of Unchehara alone, those from the cottage industry, small-scale industries, traditional crafts only and would exclude people from outside.

9. Research Methodology

This study will use a descriptive, ethnographic research approach to explore the traditional crafts of Satna district, particularly the Unchehara Phool Thali Udyog. Qualitative data collection

research methods will be used to collect qualitative data that will be of proper understanding over the issues and opportunities of these local artisans crafts. The research will focus upon their lived experiences, cultural context, as well as economic conditions of those craftsmen.

Data Collection Methods:

- A semi-structured questionnaire will be administered to all the artisans, local traders, and community members. These questionnaires will enable the collection of views from the artisans on the decay of the craft and the potential for its development.
- Interviews would be conducted with key players like artisans, community leaders, and cooperative society people to comprehend the socio cultural and economic considerations affecting the craft.
- This observation will be based on the direct observation of the products made to note the process, materials, and tools used in making the Phool metal product.

Data Analysis:

- It would investigate thematic points through qualitative data collection regarding the decline in the craft, the impacts that such decline has borne upon the artisans, and how the artisans could be enhanced.
- The study engages the cultural background and meaning of these handicrafts using an ethnographic perspective-situated within the results of the wider Satna socio-economic context.

10. Expected Outcomes

It is hoped that the research study will provide a comprehensive and descriptive analysis of factors influencing the handicraft sector in Unchehara and the potential growth opportunities. Therefore, the research findings will be highly useful in deriving working steps and strategies that may help rekindle and sustain positive momentum for growth across the sector and contribute generally to the regions socioeconomic growth. The likely outcome from this study is that it will indicate some of the following:

- In-depth Understanding of Craft Decline: The study will offer an in-depth examination of why the craft declined, with special focus on the Unchehara Phool Thali Udyog, along with the historical and contemporary influences, including changing cost of material, government policy, and adoption of more modern substitutes like steel ware.
- Emergence of Challenges Faced by Artisans: The present study is anticipated to discover which of the following is listed below as the major challenges faced by artisans: limited availability of raw materials, low demand, the states lack of assistance to artisans, and the impact of industrialization on the traditional handicraft.
- Cultural and Economic Importance: The research will improve knowledge on the cultural value of Phool metallic element in the old rituals and ceremonies, and

economic importance for supporting the livelihood of the artist. It explains the importance of this craft in keeping the countrys cultural herit age. 4. Opportunity for Renewal: Thematic analysis will help in exploring this research to unfold possibilities that might be used for the revival and development of traditional crafts. This would be looking at plausible interventions such as support from the government, markets expansion through tourism and then e-commerce, and how cooperative societies influence artisans.

- Recommendations for Policy and Sustainable Development: This should form proposals that the findings of the study will make towards local authorities and stakeholders on how these traditional industries can be enhanced and preserved. Some of the policy suggestions might range from proposals in relevance to how one can support local crafts, improve the access of artisans toward resources and means of facilitation, and empowerment in training and awareness programs to polish the craft.

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